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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Business Innovation Group (BIG) News" (2014). *Business Innovation Group News*. 243.
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Business Grows with GENIE

September 23, 2014

Jeff Brewer was the first GENIE client in Telfair County to go out on a limb looking for business assistance. Currently working in forest management, Brewer has the heart of an entrepreneur.

A few years back Brewer experienced something all **good** entrepreneurs fear... failure. He and his partner(s) in a lumber company made a decision to manufacture posts. Things happened, money was lost, and he left the venture in his past to pursue more safe and stable employment in timber management.

Like all **great** entrepreneurs, however, Brewer never lost the spirit. He learned from his failure and moved forward.

After discovering a Japanese non-astringent Persimmon variety that's unique to our area, Brewer began rooting his newest venture. Following in his grandfather's footsteps, he's starting a nursery and fruit farm.

Our GENIE team met Jeff at an information session in Telfair back in March of this year. He had already made quick use of family farmland and planted over nine acres in the unique persimmon trees. These trees will take about four years to reach full maturity at which point, they should yield about 50 lbs/tree.

As a first time farmer, Brewer formed strong relationships with the local county extension office. They worked together on soil samples and irrigation. Brewer immediately started applying for USDA grants and recently found out that he has been awarded their Seasonal High Tunnel or "Hoop House" grant. This grant will help secure funds and technical assistance in getting a hoop house put up to extend the growing season in an environmentally safe way during winter months.

GENIE advisors connected Brewer with a mentor farmer in Bulloch County who previously received the same grant. He will share his experience and expertise in the processes with Brewer. The GENIE team has also been helping Brewer source other agricultural grants and small business loans.

The GENIE team also conducted research on potential markets and distributors for the unique persimmons as they ripen. Brewer recently traveled to the Georgia Southern City Campus to attend a Quickbooks class hosted by the Georgia Southern Small Business Development Center. Through the GENIE program, Jeff received a scholarship and was able to attend the class for free. GENIE also provided Brewer with his own copy of the accounting software to assist with his business financials.

Brewer and his unique persimmon farm were recently featured in the GEMC Georgia Magazine September edition for the Little Ocmulgee area. <http://www.littleocmulgeeemc.com/newsletters/documents/loemc0914.pdf>

GENIE business advisor Suzanne Hallman says, "We are proud to be a part of this growing business and look forward to continuing to assist Mr. Brewer as he is able to enjoy the fruits of his labor."

Georgia's Enterprise Network for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (GENIE) is a web-based virtual business incubator focused on assisting entrepreneurs and small business owners in economically challenged counties in Georgia. GENIE's goal is to help create and retain jobs in Georgia by harnessing the power of entrepreneurship. GENIE is a grant secured through the Community Adjustment and Investment Program (CAIP) which helps the private sector to create new jobs and preserve existing jobs that are at risk of being lost in communities that suffered job losses directly or indirectly attributed to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). GENIE participation is open to any interested parties in Georgia with efforts focused in Jeff Davis, Jefferson, Lincoln, Telfair, and Wilkes counties.